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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2390

RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 0050

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2232

RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 0081

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2167

RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PHNOM PENH 001400

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS, DRL

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SUBJECT: CAMBODIA'S NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO INAUGURATE BURMA CAUCUS ON AUGUST 25

Classified By: A/DCM Margaret McKean; Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

**¶1.** (SBU) Summary. Cambodia's National Assembly will launch its Burma Caucus on August 25, with 25 parliamentarians from the three political parties as members, according to organizing MP Son Chhay of the opposition Sam Rainsy Party (SRP). Other AIPMC (ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus) members are expected to attend, and invitations will also be extended to interested parliamentarians from Australia, New Zealand, and the EU, as well as members of the diplomatic community in Phnom Penh. National Assembly President Heng Samrin will officiate at the inauguration, and Prime Minister Hun Sen is expected to meet with the delegates from other countries. Son Chhay is hopeful that the Caucus will be able to agree on a resolution on Burma for submission to the National Assembly, but acknowledges that the concept of a special interest group like the Burma Caucus is new to Cambodian political thinking.  
End Summary.

Burma Caucus: Cambodia on Board (Hopefully)

**¶2.** (SBU) On August 3, A/DCM met with SRP opposition parliamentarian Son Chhay to discuss the National Assembly's plans to inaugurate a Burma Caucus on August 25. Son Chhay said that with the Prime Minister's approval and consultations with AIPMC's head office in Malaysia, the wheels are in motion to formally announce the Caucus later in the month. Within the National Assembly, ten CPP members will join, as will five members from FUNCINPEC. The SRP has designated ten MPs for the Caucus, including party leader Sam Rainsy and his wife, Tioulong Saumura. Among the CPP members, two have educational ties to the United States. Among the FUNCINPEC members are a former Minister of Justice, and a graduate of a university in the United States who has been one of the more outspoken members of the National Assembly. FUNCINPEC MP Than Sina, who had been a participant in a AIPMC-sponsored trip to Burma in the past, was not on the list, noted Son Chhay, who regretted the omission.

**¶3.** (SBU) Son Chhay envisions an inauguration ceremony on August 25 followed by a dinner hosted by National Assembly President Heng Samrin. The following day he anticipates will include meetings and discussions with visiting ASEAN parliamentarians and MPs from outside the region. He hopes that Prime Minister Hun Sen, who had earlier agreed to meet with foreign officials who come to Cambodia for the inauguration, will meet with the group on August 26. Given

the last-minute preparations, Son Chhay said that it would not be possible to host the conference that he had originally envisioned, but that he would pursue the idea at a later date. The important thing is to get the Caucus launched and operational, he affirmed.

¶4. (C) In addition to ASEAN MPs and other legislators with an interest in Burma, Son Chhay is inviting many members of the diplomatic community resident in Phnom Penh, including the Burmese Ambassador -- with whom Son Chhay is scheduled to meet on August 4 to encourage his participation. Son Chhay related an earlier conversation with the Burmese Ambassador, in which the latter told Son Chhay that he was aware of the Caucus initiative, and assured Son Chhay that he understood the purpose and discussions regarding Burma were not an issue. Son Chhay has also invited the Chinese Ambassador to Cambodia, who had been less than encouraging about the Burma Caucus, but agreed to forward Son Chhay's invitation to Beijing for a senior government official to attend the inauguration.

¶5. (C) Prospects for getting the Caucus to agree on a resolution on Burma for consideration by the National Assembly remain an open question, said Son Chhay. Given the precedent set by other ASEAN national bodies, Son Chhay is hopeful that he can convince the CPP to follow suit in Cambodia's case. If Hun Sen agrees, the party will obey the decision, he said. He understands that the Prime Minister remains undecided as to just how far he can push the Burma issue, but will likely accede to any action that has a precedent within ASEAN, Son Chhay noted. Son Chhay had hoped that individual members of the National Assembly would be able to join the Caucus on their own volition rather than being assigned by their respective parties, but that was not

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the case. He noted that the concept of a special interest group tracking a non-domestic issue in Cambodia's political scene is new, and he must be prepared for incremental successes -- the first being the inauguration of the body on August 25.

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